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Review of *Grass: In Search of Human Habitat*. By Joe C. Truett. Foreword by Harry W. Greene.

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Grass: In Search of Human Habitat. By Joe C. Truett. Foreword by Harry W. Greene. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. xvii + 217 pp. Illustrations, notes, references, index. \$40.00 cloth.

Grass: In Search of Human Habitat meanders over a lot of landscape, aiming to link grassland ecosystems and human well being. Truett's approach is narrative and personal, recounting his childhood in rural East Texas, training in wildlife biology and range management at Texas A&M, and career experiences in grassland management, including his current position as a biologist with the Turner Endangered Species Fund.

From the book's opening image of atomic bomb testing on the New Mexico Plains, the book has a decidedly southwestern feel. Most of his examples and case studies are from drier portions of the Great Plains, particularly those in west Texas and eastern New Mexico. Truett draws on all of these experiences to sketch a picture of current attitudes and key problems in grassland conservation.

What are these key problems? They turn out to be a complex mix of a history of science-based range management that may succeed in maximizing short-term gains in livestock production but generally fails to consider conservation of native species; and an increasingly difficult economic climate for ranchers and other grassland denizens.

In addressing the first issue, Truett reviews the classic academic works on grassland ecology and range management—for example, Frederick Clements's successional theory and Howard Odum's ideas on energy flow. Chapter notes are included but are brief and not linked to specific passages in the body of the chapter. Overall, Truett gives an engaging summary of the basic ideas in grassland ecology as well as the high points of current debates about how to best manage grasslands.

Much of the book is devoted to discussing the heavy human dependence on grasslands and whether this relationship can be maintained in company with grassland conservation. Can humans continue to use grasslands for food, fiber, and newer uses like biofuels and carbon banking while still sustaining the ecosystem? Many of us in academic ecology struggle with resolving perceived conflicts between conservation and human grassland use. In many cases, a "win-win" scenario exists in which, for example, the proper use of livestock grazing is perfectly compatible with a healthy grassland ecosystem. In other cases, such as conserving prairie dog populations, tensions have to be negotiated. Truett discusses some promising strategies that benefit both conservation and landowner concerns, such as conservation easements, conservation grants, and ecotourism.

Grasslands comprise the western "wide open spaces" that figure prominently in the country's imagination. Not many of us, even ardent conservationists, are eager to see the iconic ranching and cowboy culture disappear. Truett, however, points out that making a living in these remote areas is not going to get any easier, especially with the dwindling supply and increased cost of fossil fuels. Maintaining miles of fence line, for example, involves huge outlays in transportation costs. A clear-eyed view of expenses versus profit in ranching does not paint a rosy picture for continued economic viability. In fact, Truett makes the point that most existing ranch operations have significant subsidies, often in the form of a wife's job in town.

A particularly strong and effective message in this book is the economic difficulty encountered by people trying to make a living off grasslands in the Great Plains and Southwest. Truett renders this dilemma with an empathetic eye as a person with both a personal and professional history in grasslands. He sees answers in viewing the land differently, more for its conservation and ecotourism value than for its domestic livestock-producing potential. In this expanded vision, he ultimately presents a hopeful future for the continued viability of grasslands and their inhabitants. **Mary Ann Vinton**, *Department of Biology, Creighton University*.